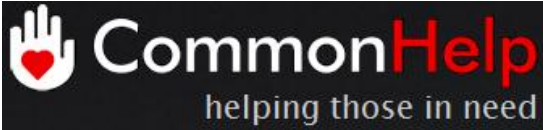


A Quick Guide to Using CommonHelp



Introduction

CommonHelp is the Commonwealth of Virginia's fast and easy way to apply online for many Virginia social services assistance programs. Through a single online site, you can find out what assistance you might be eligible for and submit one application saving you time and effort. You can also use CommonHelp to Check Your Benefits, Report Household Changes, or Renew Your Benefits.

This guide is designed to help you use CommonHelp. When you go online and start working in CommonHelp, you will find a quick 4-minute video that introduces CommonHelp. We have also included a video about using CommonHelp after you have submitted your application. Use these tools to find answers to your questions.

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Still Have Questions?
Call 1-855-635-4370

About CommonHelp

CommonHelp is a self-service portal where Virginia citizens can go to apply for assistance.

Using CommonHelp, you will be able to submit a single application to apply for assistance from multiple Department of Social Services (DSS) programs such as:

- TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- MA – Medical Assistance
- EA – Energy Assistance
- Child Care – Assistance for Child Care services

This makes applying easier and more convenient.

After You Have Submitted Your Application

With CommonHelp you and your authorized representative can check your benefits, report changes and renew your benefits.

Please note: You cannot use CommonHelp to check your benefits, report changes, or renew benefits with Child Care or Energy assistance.

Your Information Is Kept Private

CommonHelp is private and confidential. Information you enter online into CommonHelp is protected. Access to your information is secured by use of a User ID and password.








Each application also receives a unique tracking number which you should keep. Use this number if you ever need to call or stop by an office to discuss your application.

Navigation Tips

Here are the basics for getting around in the system.

Buttons

Buttons are at the bottom of each CommonHelp page.

	Saves information entered on the page and takes you to the next page or tab
	Saves information entered on the page and takes you back to the previous page or tab
	Enables you to include another item to the information you're entering, such as an additional person, another employer, a source of income, an additional expense, or an additional insurance policy
	Saves your unsubmitted application and allows you to leave it to come back at a later time or date
	Allows you to change information you entered earlier in CommonHelp
	Lets you remove information you entered earlier in the CommonHelp application, renewal or change. For example, you can remove a person or an employer
	Lets you tell CommonHelp that something has ended, for example a job or pregnancy

Radio Buttons

Radio buttons allow you to choose only one option as shown below. Click on the circle to select it. In this example, the option "Yes" is selected.

☒ Yes ☐ No

Checkboxes

Checkboxes allow you to select and deselect by clicking in the box. In this example, the option "No one" is selected.

☒ No one

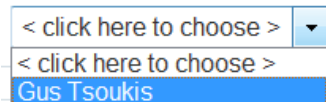


Gus

Drop-down Menus

Drop-down menus allow you to select an option from a list. Drop-down menus are identified by a down arrow to the right of the box.

Name:



Date Fields

Date fields allow you to enter a date. To type a date in, follow the pattern MM/DD/YYYY as shown in the example below.

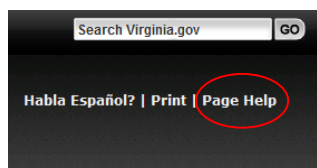
08/07/1987 Ex: mm/dd/yyyy

Links

Links take you directly to another page within CommonHelp. Most links are identified by underlined text. Click on the underlined text to go to that page.

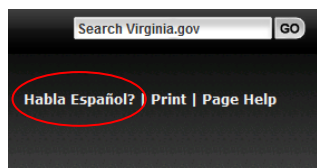
Page Help

On every page in CommonHelp, there is a link to helpful information you can use if you feel you need more information about the question you're answering. Click on the Page Help link found in the top right area of the page.



Spanish

The entire CommonHelp system is also available in Spanish. Use the Spanish version of the system by clicking the Habla Espanol? link found in the top right area of the page.



How to Use CommonHelp

Am I Eligible?

Click the "Am I Eligible?" button on the CommonHelp home page to answer short questions and be told if you and the members of your household may or may not be eligible for assistance. It takes about 15 minutes to complete. The information you enter here is not saved.

The "Am I Eligible?" tool is not required. It's an optional step, but it can help give you an idea of what to expect if you decide to complete and submit an application.

The "Am I Eligible?" tool has 4 parts:

1. **Get Started** – Explains the process of screening for benefits.
2. **Household Information** – Collects information about yourself and all members of your household.
3. **Individual Details** – Prompts you to answer questions about each individual household member.
4. **Results** – Shows you the list of programs for which you may or may not be eligible..

Apply for Benefits

Click the "Apply for Benefits" button on the CommonHelp home page to start an application for assistance.

It typically takes about 20-40 minutes to complete. If you need to stop, you can save and exit your application at any time and return to complete it later.

The online application includes the following:

1. **Getting Started** – Guides you through setting up an account to create a User Name and Password.



Be sure to write down your User ID and Password. You will need them to start your application. You will also need them to re-enter the system should you decide to save and stop the application and need to return to it later.

Next, this section collects basic information about you and your household. Prepare for this section by having the following information ready:

- Household income from jobs, child support and other income sources
- Social Security Numbers and birth dates of household members
- Current or recent health insurance information
- Housing and utility expense information

- Dependent care or disability expense information, including day care and medical expenses
 - Resource information, such as bank accounts, vehicles, homes, property, life insurance, etc. Please note: Some social services do not need resource information. Resource questions will only be asked if this information is needed to determine eligibility
 - If you are a U.S. citizen, you must declare citizenship and provide proof of identity
 - Non-U.S. citizens must provide documentation indicating lawful residence in the U.S
 - For Food Assistance (SNAP), you must include children under age 22 and also include anyone else who eats with you
2. **Household** – Prompts you to answer information about you and all members of your household.
 3. **Benefits** – Asks you to choose which assistance programs your household is applying for.
 4. **Individual Details** – Asks details about the household and each individual member.
 5. **Income** –Collects information about your income and that of other members in your household.
 6. **Expenses** – Includes questions about the expenses of all household members.
 7. **Insurance** – Asks questions about the insurance held by members in the household.
 8. **Resources** – Collects information about resources held by you and other household members such as bank accounts, vehicles, homes, property and life insurance; you may be asked to supply information about other members in your household.
 9. **Summary**– Asks you to review all the information you’ve entered in CommonHelp up to this point; provides you a chance to make additions or corrections.
 10. **Next Steps** -- Explains which programs you applied for and which office will receive your submitted application.
 11. **Verification** – Tells you your options to submit your completed application. The simplest choice is to submit it electronically. Information on other options (mailing, faxing and personal drop-off to a local DSS office) is also provided.
 12. **Submit e-Application** – Takes you step-by-step through the electronic signature process so that you can submit your application online. If you choose to submit electronically, you will receive a tracking number and confirmation that your application was successfully submitted.

After Submitting Your Application

The Virginia Department of Social Services will see if you qualify for assistance. You will receive a Notice of Action with a case number.

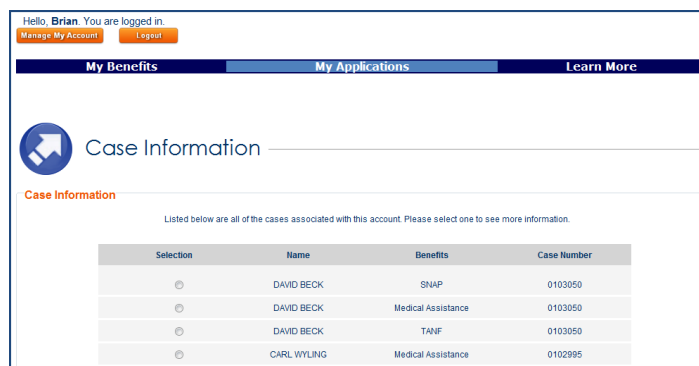
You will have the opportunity to link your case to your CommonHelp account using your User ID and Password. When the case has been linked, you can Check Your Benefits, Report Household Changes, and Renew Your Benefits through CommonHelp.

How to Link Your Case and Account

Sign into CommonHelp. Look for the Manage My Account page. Answer a few questions to verify your identity. If the answers are correct, you will then be able to link your case. CommonHelp will give you step-by-step instructions on how to link a case to a CommonHelp account.

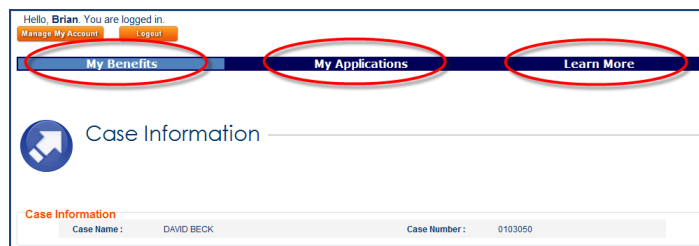
Check Your Benefits Online

To check your benefits online with CommonHelp, log in from the CommonHelp homepage. Just like before, type your User ID and password.



Selection	Name	Benefits	Case Number
<input type="radio"/>	DAVID BECK	SNAP	0103050
<input type="radio"/>	DAVID BECK	Medical Assistance	0103050
<input type="radio"/>	DAVID BECK	TANF	0103050
<input type="radio"/>	CARL WYLLING	Medical Assistance	0102995

View the Case Information page (above). It shows the cases linked with your account. Select the radio button for the case that you want to review.






This will bring you to the Case Information page which has 3 tabs– My Benefits, My Applications and Learn More. If you have only one case you will be navigated directly to the Case Information page.

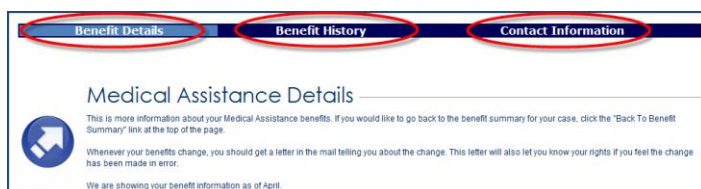
You will start on a tab called “My Benefits.” The My Benefits tab shows you:

- The name of the benefits being received under this case
- The status
- The names of all the people in the household who are receiving the benefits
- Any documentation you need to give to your case worker
- Your upcoming renewals

My Benefits
As of Thursday, April 26, 2012

Benefits	Status	Details
Medical Assistance	In April 2012, ALANA, DAVID, JENNA, and JUSTIN are getting Medical Assistance benefits.	
SNAP (Food Assistance)	In April 2012, ALANA, DAVID, JENNA, and JUSTIN are getting SNAP (Food Assistance) benefits.	
TANF (Cash Assistance)	In April 2012, ALANA, DAVID, JENNA, and JUSTIN are getting TANF (Cash Assistance) benefits.	

Clicking on the Magnifying Glass icon next to one of the benefit programs will take you to a detail page about that benefit.



For example, the image above is for a detailed MA (Medical Assistance) benefit. There are 3 tabs at the top: Benefit Details, Benefit History, and Contact Information. When you click on them, you will see more details.

- **Benefits Details** – This shows you what the benefit payment details are for this month.
- **Benefit History** – This shows payment details for the past 12 months.
- **Contact Details** – This shows you the name, location, address, and phone number of your assigned case worker, and your contact information.

Report Your Changes

When you are approved for benefits, you will need to report certain changes to your case worker. To report changes, sign in to CommonHelp using your User ID and password. Choose "Report My Changes." Click the box next to the case you want to update and report the changes to the household information.

CommonHelp will take you step-by-step through questions that let you report your changes. At the end, you will be prompted to submit the changes.

Renew Your Benefits

CommonHelp shows when you need to renew your benefits. To see if it's time to renew, sign in to CommonHelp with your User ID and password. Choose "Renew My Benefits." Check the box next to the benefit you want to renew.

CommonHelp will take you step-by-step through questions that let you renew your benefits. At the end, you will be asked to submit the renewal application.

Stopping Your Application to Come Back at a Later Time

With CommonHelp, you can stop your application and then come back to it at a later time or date.

To do this, click the **Save + Exit** button before closing your internet browser.



If you close your internet browser without first clicking **Save + Exit**, you will lose information you entered. Always click **Save + Exit** before leaving CommonHelp.

Returning to Your Application

To come back to the application at a later time, go to the CommonHelp home page. Enter the User ID and password you created during the setup of your account.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How long will it take to apply for assistance using CommonHelp?

A: It takes most applicants between 20 to 40 minutes.

Q: How long will my application be saved?

A: CommonHelp gives you 60 days from the last update to complete an application.

Q: Do I have to sign my application electronically?

A: If you submit your application electronically, then you will sign it electronically. If you do not want to sign and submit your application electronically, you can go to the [Application for Benefits](#) to download the VDSS application for Benefits. You can print the application, complete it, sign it, and then submit it either via mail, fax or personal drop-off to the local Department of Social Services in your area.

Q: After I submit my application and receive the confirmation, do I need to do anything else?

A: The local agency will contact you with further information on conducting an interview or returning verifications.

Q: Does information I enter in “Am I Eligible?” show up automatically for me in “Apply for Benefits”?

A: No. Information you enter in the “Am I Eligible?” tool does not carry over to “Apply for Benefits.” The questions in “Am I Eligible?” are designed to quickly give you an idea of the type of assistance you might be able to receive. To apply for assistance, CommonHelp needs more details.

Q: How do I add another benefit (SNAP, TANF, Energy, Medical Assistance, Child Care) to a CommonHelp application I’ve already started?

A:

- Log back into CommonHelp
- Select ‘Keep Working on an application that you have started online’
- Use the Previous Button to return to the beginning of the application
- Select any additional programs (Child Care, TANF, SNAP, Medical Assistance, Energy) you want to add to this application
- CommonHelp will show the screens that need to be filled out
- Complete and submit the application